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## International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

**ISSUE-IN-FOCUS, JUNE 26, 2009**

### No Place for Drugs!



International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is observed each year on June 26 to raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs represent to society. The United and Thailand are working together to inspire people and mobilize local support for drug control. Learn more about how the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is working with its Thai partners to create a drug free society in Thailand.

### Story:

International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking is observed each year on June 26 to raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs represent to society, particularly among youth. The Day marks the global community's determination to strengthen action and cooperation to achieve the goal of an international society free of drug abuse.

The international campaign -- "Do drugs control your life? Your life. Your community. No place for drugs." -- informs the world about the destructive effects of illicit drugs and reminds us that it should be a concern for all. The use of illicit drugs harms not only individuals, but also families and society at large. Celebrate International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking on June 26 and do your part to promote a society free of drug abuse!

## U.S.-Thailand Working together to Stop Illicit Drug Use

"Marginalized people's problems are often not what we think," says Prin Visavakum. "I know that the scope of our work is public health, but sometimes we and our partners have to go a little bit beyond that to really help people."



*Prin Visavakum*  
*Coordinator, Prevention for Special*  
*Populations Section, Centers for Disease*  
*Control and Prevention (CDC)*

Prin is a project coordinator for community-based HIV/AIDS prevention among special populations at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Partly thanks to his efforts, small numbers of injecting drug users (IDU) throughout Bangkok are taking the first steps toward getting tested for HIV infection.

He works among populations whose behaviors are notoriously difficult to change. HIV prevalence among IDUs has remained higher than 40% for a decade.

"Sometimes it helps to look beyond, to look at root causes," he says. "Once the reasons for drug abuse are addressed, then we can start to think about preventing disease."

In May of this year, Prin was honored with a Global Health Achievement Award, one of five awards worldwide given this year by CDC headquarters in Atlanta celebrating outstanding, talented, and dedicated locally employed staff. The technical skills, dedication, and commitment documented in the award write-up are evident in the manual he helped develop for IDU outreach workers.

This first-of-its-kind guidebook uses the field experiences of Thai IDUs who have volunteered to help their peers. Produced with support from [CDC's Global AIDS Program](#) (GAP), the manual has been requested by and distributed to several organizations, such as [PSI](#), [Raks Thai](#), and the Thailand Ministry of Public Health's [Bureau of AIDS, TB and STIs](#).

Central to the peer outreach concept is the assumption that IDUs understand fellow IDUs better than anyone else. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) now employs IDU outreach workers at some of its methadone clinics. Historically, this approach has been taken only by nongovernmental organizations in Thailand. Prin has helped demonstrate that a government agency and IDU peer staff can work well together.

Linking programs to government-supported clinics, which combine methadone treatment and HIV testing with access to care and treatment, has the potential to make a big impact on IDUs' lives and the future spread of HIV in this group. The peer outreach program has attracted the attention of people attempting similar efforts worldwide.

Organizations from inside and outside Thailand make study visits to the BMA office that houses IDU outreach staff. Prin presented the BMA program at an international conference in Vancouver. Countries in Africa are looking at the model and have invited GAP to provide technical assistance.

Prin's concern with at-risk populations started with an interest in development. He earned a bachelor's degree from Chiang Mai University, then went on to take a master's in environment and management from Waikato University in New Zealand. He worked briefly on environmental issues in Thailand before joining CDC. Currently he is studying for a second master's degree in medical and health social sciences at Mahidol University.

Similar to the prevention work with IDUs, a behavior change model using peer outreach is now being tested in a few provincial Thai prisons. Prin took on this challenge knowing that no prison in Thailand was providing routine HIV counseling services to prisoners. He recently shared details about the prison work at the HIV Implementers' Meeting in Windhoek, Namibia on June 14.

"Our projects follow a typical pattern," says Prin. "First we help build up infrastructure and human capacity, then we try out a model. If we test it and it works, we help scale it up and integrate it into what exists."

For more information on the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking and global efforts to mobilize public support for a drug free society, please visit the following:.

- **The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking**  
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/26-June.html>
- **The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on HIV/AIDS**  
<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/hiv-aids/index.html>
- **U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration**  
<http://www.usdoj.gov/dea/index.htm>
- **U.S. CDC Division of HIV/AIDS**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/>
- **U.S. Department of State - Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL)**  
<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/>